

[R4083 : page 331]

## **EACH SHALL GIVE ACCOUNT TO GOD**

**- ROMANS 14:12-23. - NOVEMBER 24. -**

**Golden Text: – "Judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way." – Romans 14:13.**

AGAIN the International Sunday-School Committee requests Christian people in general to consider the evils of intemperance – the importance of temperance in all things on the part of those professing godliness. Such lessons seem to be all the more important when we perceive that the rush, the push, the hurry, the consumption of nervous energy on the part of people in general, seems to be causing an increase of nervous and mental disorders and an enlargement of the lists of the insane. Certainly no one claiming benevolence of heart and soundness of judgment could in any sense of the word advocate or encourage intemperance, realizing that it is a fruitful source of crime, depravity, immorality, etc. We note with pleasure the spread of local option and total prohibition in many of the southern States. Not that such restraints are the highest ideals of liberty, but that – seeing the necessity for the restraints – those who love liberty are willing to share the bondage for the sake of their fellow-citizens, to whom full liberty is admittedly injurious. Either climatic variations or financial and social changes account for the fact that there was less tendency to drunkenness in the days of the Lord and the apostles than there is now, and probably for this [R4084 : page 332] reason the Scriptures have less to say respecting this, which is one of the chiefest evils in our day.

But no amount of interest in the temperance question should permit us to read into the divine Word what was not

intended by the inspired writers – though we may properly enough draw inferences and conclusions. First of all we must take the lesson provided for us as we find it. It is a part of the Apostle's discussion of liberty and law, custom and conscience, on questions that were prominent at the time of writing. The Jews were accustomed to observe their Law with great exactness, and very properly so. Consequently it seemed a very peculiar lesson for them to be obliged to learn, that they were no longer under the Law, hoping for eternal life through the observance of it, but were under grace, hoping for life eternal by the forgiveness of their sins through the merit of the sacrifice of Christ. The Jews at Rome, for instance, had experienced trials and difficulties for a long time in their endeavor to observe the Law – the keeping of the Jewish Sabbath Day, the avoidance of meats that had been strangled or offered to idols. When these accepted Christ they had great difficulty in realizing that the Law Covenant under which they had been seeking to please God was at an end, and that they must seek new principles for their guidance in respect to worship, service, self-control. Naturally enough some minds grasped the situation more quickly than did others. Some accepted Christ and felt all the previous bondage to the Jewish ritual; others saw more broadly that Christ had become the end of the Law Covenant to everyone that believeth, and that the Law which he had instituted had indeed the spirit of the ten commandments and the Jewish ritual but not the letter of them, and that to him that is in Christ Jesus there is no Law except that of love: love to God supremely, love to the brethren and love to our neighbors – a law seen to be very comprehensive indeed when studied, but on its surface quite different from the Law of commandments given to the house of servants.

"The New Commandment," or new law of love, left much more to the discretion and judgment of the individual than did the Law commandments given at Sinai and written in stones. With the latter there was no discretion, but with the former

responsibility for decision rests largely with the individual and his own conscience. Hence some, reasoning broadly, said to themselves, "The Jewish Law Covenant being at an end its restrictions are no longer in force where they would clash with the law of love and the spirit of a sound mind: I may, therefore, eat such food as I find will be helpful to me, and am no longer forbidden to eat certain kinds." Further, as the mind expanded and grew it was realized that the idols were not gods at all, and hence that the custom of the people to offer the meat to idols before it was sold for consumption had really done the meat no harm, and hence it might be eaten without any disrespect to God if he were acknowledged and thanked therefor.

### **CONSIDERING THE WEAKER BRETHREN**

In reasoning on this question the Apostle leaves no room for doubt as to his conception of the right or wrong of the question at issue. He agreed heartily with the enlightened few that an idol was nothing more than a piece of human handiwork, and that therefore the offering of meat before it as a sacrifice amounted to nothing and did not injure the meat any more than it did the idol good. The Apostle would, therefore, feel free to eat such meat if it came convenient to him, even though he might have preferred to have such as had not been so offered. But while endorsing the position of the more intelligent he sympathized with the less intelligent, realizing that with many of them it would require considerable time to surmount their natural prejudices and give their consciences the proper and sure footing on the subject. In other words, all Jews would need education along this line, and some could take the education more rapidly than others, but the former should be sympathetic with the latter and to a large extent should defer to them.

## **"BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST"**

Our lesson opens in the midst of this argument with the declaration, "So then each one of us should give an account of himself to God." By these words the Apostle seeks to impress the thought that the weaker brethren are not to judge and censure the others, neither the stronger brethren to judge and censure the weaker. All are to remember that God is the Judge, and that each one needs to criticise himself rather than to criticise his brother – to make sure that he himself has a conscience void of offence toward God and man. Each one so doing may feel sure eventually of the divine approval. The same thought is given in a preceding verse (v. 10), which reads, "For we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ." Each one of the Church is on trial, and our Lord Jesus as the Father's representative criticises and examines the various members of his Body, not with a view to cutting them off, but, on the contrary, for their aid and encouragement, assistance and instruction and preparation for the Kingdom. As we are now before the judgment-seat of Christ, so during the Millennial Age the whole world of mankind will be before his judgment-seat and be separated into two classes, sheep and goats. During the world's judgment the overcomers of this Gospel Age, the brethren, the Bride, will be with the Lord in his Millennial throne as he promised, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne"; and again, "To him that overcometh will I grant power over the nations"; and again, "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world"? – in conjunction with their Lord. – Rev. 3:21; Rev. 2:26; I Cor. 6:2.

But not only are we now standing before the judgment-seat of Christ, and day by day rendering up a measure of account in respect to our faithfulness, loyalty, etc., but eventually at the close of this age the decisions will be given by him as he pictures in the parable of the young nobleman. On his return

from a far [R4084 : page 333] country, invested with full power and authority, he will give to every one in his Church according as his work has been – according to his faithfulness in the use of his talents, privileges, opportunities – according to his faithfulness and obedience to the "New Commandment" given to all, that they should love one another as he had loved them. Then every man's work shall be made manifest, however misunderstood in the present time. Some highly esteemed amongst men will be shown to be less esteemed of the Lord, and some little esteemed amongst men will be granted high honors in the Kingdom. Therefore, we are not to gauge ourselves entirely by what our fellow-men might think, but to have special respect to the Lord and his judgment of us. Hence the Apostle argues, Let us not, therefore, judge [condemn] one another any more, but let our judgment rather turn to ourselves, to see that nothing in our conduct toward our brethren shall be in any sense of the word contrary to our Master's new law of love. Watching that law carefully, and applying it to ourselves, we will be hindered from any course of conduct which would tend to stumble a brother; and such a love for the brethren as would lead us to the renouncement of our own liberties where necessary would certainly be pleasing in the sight of the Lord and the heavenly Father, and assure us a place and a higher honor than would otherwise be ours.

### **"FOR WHOM CHRIST DIED"**

The Apostle then assures his hearers of his own conviction that there is no such thing as legally unclean or forbidden food from the Lord's standpoint for those who are New Creatures in Christ. Love for the brethren, however, should lead us to renounce to some extent our own liberties and preferences lest our exercise of liberty might do injury to some for whom Christ died. His argument is that if we have the love of Christ we will hesitate to do anything that would wound or injure or cause a

stumbling of conscience to any member of the Body. If Christ so loved them that his death was made available to their salvation, we should so love them as to be willing to cooperate for their assistance and do nothing that might stumble or hinder them. He argued further that having taken a stand for the Lord and for righteousness we should be careful that our outward conduct would conform to this in as large a degree as possible, and that this would mean that we should do nothing that to others would seem to be unrighteous. "Let not your good be evil spoken of," rather exercise yourself along such lines of goodness and in such a manner as will have the approval of all who have respect for religious things. An application of this principle today would seem to be that we who have a clearer knowledge than have some others of the meaning of the Sabbath, for instance, should so conduct ourselves in the observance of Sunday as would bring no disrespect to the Lord nor to his Word. A proper time and occasion may occur for explaining our **[R4085 : page 333]** higher thought respecting the significance of the Sabbath, but meanwhile let us reverentially keep Sunday, not as under the bondage of the Law, but as a great privilege and opportunity for fellowship in spiritual things, better than any we could ourselves devise. The same principle will apply to other matters or outward manifestations in which reverence for God and holy things may have a bearing upon our influence with others. Reverence for all good things is surely appropriate to all who love the Lord and love his righteousness. Increasing knowledge would make us increasingly reverential, not only in heart, but also in outward demonstration.

**"THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NOT MEAT AND DRINK,  
BUT RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PEACE AND JOY IN THE  
HOLY SPIRIT"**

This statement by the Apostle has been grievously misunderstood and misconstrued by some, and interpreted to teach that the Kingdom of God is not a real Kingdom to come, with Jesus as the King, the Church as the joint-heirs in the Kingdom, and the world as the subjects, to bless, rule and uplift during the Millennial Age. It is used to oppose this thought, the claim being that when the words Kingdom of God are used throughout the Scriptures they signify not a real Kingdom but a rule of righteousness, joy, peace, in the hearts of believers. This is a serious misinterpretation of the Apostle's thought. His argument may be paraphrased thus: Abstain, dear brethren, from the use of your liberty in Christ wherever you find that it would stumble the conscience of another or be to his hindrance in any manner. Consider not that the advantages of being counted in as members of Christ's prospective Kingdom consists in these liberties to eat and drink what you choose, but rather consider that the blessings we enjoy in the present time as members of that prospective Kingdom are the peace of heart, the joy of heart, the righteousness of the Lord and his holy Spirit. These are the blessings of the present time, and not the mere liberties in respect to food. Hence we may readily renounce these liberties if they interfere with the advantage of others, and we will thereby find ourselves increasing in love and joy and peace of the holy Spirit by reason of such sacrifices. The Church indeed is the Kingdom of God in an embryotic sense – in the sense that each member is here being instructed and prepared for the duties and privileges of the Kingdom to come, especially being developed and tested along the lines of his own fitness for a share in that Kingdom. But all of this emphasizes the fact expressed in our Lord's prayer that God's Kingdom is to come, and, coming, will bring about in the world that condition of things in which eventually God's will will be done on earth as it is now being done in heaven.

Continuing this thought the Apostle urges (vs. 18,19) that such service, such self-denials for Christ's sake, are well pleasing to God, and will also have the approval of right-thinking men, and that all the Lord's followers therefore should thus be making for peace and those things and conditions whereby they may edify, strengthen and build one another up. What a precious **[R4085 : page 334]** lesson is here! Oh, that all of the Lord's dear people could catch the spirit of the Apostle's exhortation and see how beautiful it must be in God's sight that his people should emulate the example of their Redeemer in their willingness to deny themselves for the sake of helping others. With this spirit prevailing largely in a company of the Lord's followers, assuredly there would be a great blessing and great upbuilding of one another, a great strengthening of character and great assistance one to the other, and great absence of puffed-up superiority and disdain for those unable to see and appreciate every feature of the divine plan.

"The things that make for peace." Oh, how blessed the congregation of the Lord's people which has a goodly number of such followers of Christ, especially if they be among the leading ones! How their love and peace and unity of spirit would assist them to be kind and generous toward others and helpful – not by ignoring the principles of truth, not by putting the light under a bushel, but by presenting the Truth in so kind and gentle a manner that all who are of the Truth would appreciate it and be strengthened thereby. How potent the Apostle's argument, "Overthrow not for meat's sake the work of God" – do not jeopardize the interests of either the Church or of an individual in it merely for the sake of preserving a non-essential. As the Apostle exhorted Timothy, "Condescend to men of low estate," condescend to the weakest and humblest of the Lord's true followers; come down to them in speech and in conduct that you may be the abler assistant of those who need the uplifting and enlightening influence of the Truth in the spirit.



## **"ALL THINGS INDEED ARE PURE"**

We are not to understand these words of the Apostle to indicate that nothing is impure or unclean. Quite to the contrary. He has elsewhere pointed out many impurities of thought and act, and advised the Church against these. Here his words are confined to the subject in hand – nothing indeed is unclean – no kind of meat. He proceeds, however, to point out where wrong might be done even in eating of that which is cleanest, most desirable, or in the exercise of any other liberty – it is evil to the one whose conscience would be injured by it. In a word, conscience is one of our most valuable assets; according to our obedience to conscience will be our standing before the Lord. If, therefore, we violate our own consciences in anything we do, we are doing ourselves injury; or if by word or example we influence others to violate their consciences, however harmless a thing in itself it may be, we are doing them a serious injury, the outcome of which we cannot fully estimate, for it might go on to great and greater ungodliness and eventuate in the Second Death. Hence, it is good not to eat flesh nor to drink wine nor to do anything whereby thy brother might be stumbled or offended or made weak.

## **FAITH VERSUS CONDEMNATION**

"The faith which thou hast, have thou to thyself before God." That is to say, our outward conduct need not necessarily show all the depth of our knowledge and faith and liberty. God knows the heart, he sees the progress we have made, and he will be the better pleased with us if for the sake of the brethren we do not declare all our liberties at a time and a place when they might prove injurious to others of his dear family. The Apostle proceeds to point out that if we be critical in examining our own conduct and motives we may find something therein very similar in kind to that which we are disposed to criticize in

others, though perhaps in relation to a different subject. His words are, "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that which he alloweth." For instance, he who judges another, allows or concludes that that other's motives are inspired by pride or ambition; if he turns his criticism upon himself may sometimes find something of this kind in his own heart. He who allows that his neighbor is a slanderer and condemns him for it should turn his criticism upon himself to see that his own words are always above reproach – never upon the slanderer. Happy and blessed the person who, seeing faults in others, after careful examination finds himself to be entirely free from these. Such certainly are exceptional characters.

### **"HE THAT DOUBTETH IS DAMNED"**

With the wrong conception before the mind the words of the Apostle sound extremely harsh, "He that doubteth is damned if he eat." The idea conveyed by these words to many minds laboring under the delusions of the "dark ages" is that the person who eats **[R4086 : page 334]** meat clean in itself but thinking the matter to be wrong, thus defiling his own conscience by eating, would be damned – sent to an eternity of torture. But no such thought was in the Apostle's mind nor could it be properly understood in his words. He there emphasized the fact that any person eating meat, however clean, but thinking it to be a sin, a crime, to eat it, would as a consequence be under condemnation for having violated his conscience, his judgment of the Lord's will, and this would serve as a cloud to separate between himself and the Lord, who judges the heart and not merely the outward conduct. Such an alienation might ultimately lead to the loss of the great prize of our high calling, and thus into the Great Company, or possibly eventually into the Second Death. The Apostle explains why this condemnation would hold, saying, "because he eateth not of faith" – not in harmony with his conscience – and whatsoever is not in harmony with faith and

conscience is a sin. The principle here applied to the question of using or not using spirituous liquors would certainly be profitable to all of God's people: the person who uses them believing them to be sinful is violating his conscience; the person who uses them knowing that another will be affected thereby unfavorably is violating the law of love, "Love thy neighbor as thyself." The matter becomes a very important one in our day, more than ever before, because today the question of conscience in the matter of using liquors is more pronounced than ever before. [R4086 : page 335]

The following article, clipped from the *Literary Digest*, is translated from the French, and will, we trust, be both interesting and instructive to many in connection with this lesson:

### **"UNTO THE THIRD AND FOURTH GENERATION"**

"One cannot be, with impunity, the son of a drunkard" – so says Dr. A. Joffroy, a French physician, who writes on "Alcohol and Alcoholism" in the *Revue Scientifique* (Paris, July 13). Dr. Joffroy's article reads in places like an old-fashioned temperance tract, but it is in reality a pitiless scientific statement of facts. Diseases, the author points out, are of two kinds, those that attack persons in normal health and those that touch only those who are predisposed to them. To create such morbid predispositions alcohol is eminently suited, and in this way it strikes down not only those who abuse it, but their descendants, often ceasing its ravages only when it has obliterated a whole family. We can quote here only a small part of what Dr. Joffroy says. First comes his division of diseases into the two categories mentioned above. We read:

"In the case of some diseases (scarlet fever, smallpox, plague, etc.) the pathogenic agent produces the specific malady in every one exposed to contagion, whatever may have been his

previous condition of health. But, on the other hand, there is a whole class of diseases that attack only such as are predisposed. Of 100 infants fed in the same way, one or two will become abnormally fat, because, for example, the father had gout or the mother diabetes....

"But hereditary predisposition exists also with nervous diseases, and alcoholism is one of the most effective means of creating such predisposition, as well as developing it where it exists. To have cholera or rheumatism, for instance, one must have obese, nervous alcoholic parents. A man may be seized with shaking palsy, following some violent emotion,...but heredity must be present to facilitate the action, and alcoholism is generally found to be at the bottom of this heredity.'

"In mental diseases,' Dr. Joffroy goes on to say, 'the role of heredity is greater still. We may almost say that predisposition is absolutely necessary for these.' The author rejects the classification made by some authors who divide mental diseases into those of the normal and abnormal brain. The former, he thinks, do not exist, a diseased brain being always abnormal. Even poisons that act on the brain select those who are predisposed, and this is eminently true of alcohol itself. Predispositions (generally alcoholic) determine the special form of drunkenness and explain why wine makes one man gay, another sad, another quarrelsome. Likewise, hereditary predisposition explains why alcoholism results, with one man, in an ulcer of the stomach, with another in cirrhosis of the liver, with others in paralysis of one or another set of nerves. The writer continues:

"On epilepsy the action of alcohol is quite clearly manifest; sometimes a subject plainly epileptic from infancy takes to drink at about 20, with the result that his attacks increase in violence at each excess; sometimes a man of thirty to forty years

who has had only slight seizures in childhood begins to have the characteristic attacks, which disappear or lessen when he becomes abstinent....

"In order that I may be clearly understood I will repeat the definition that I have given elsewhere of incipient degeneracy. "The totality of organic defects, of hereditary or acquired origin, which, by lessening organic resistance, create new morbid aptitudes and make causes pathogenic when of themselves they would be powerless to injure a normal organism."

"And I repeat again that, in the creation of these new morbid aptitudes, this hereditary predisposition, which dominates almost all pathology, alcoholism stands preeminent, doing more harm and counting more victims than tuberculosis. Alcoholism, in fact, not only affects the individual, but its effects are continued to his descendants. One cannot be, with impunity, the son of an alcoholic. Alcoholism begins with the father and strikes down his children, and generally its action continues, until, in the fourth or fifth generation, it has destroyed the family. But before this final result is reached, the alcoholics and their descendants are, according to circumstances, hurled into disease, madness or crime, filling our hospitals, asylums and jails, as I have already said.

"Blind indeed are those who, ignorant of the dangers of alcohol, see in it only a source of revenue!"

– *Translation made for the Literary Digest.*

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